

Senate Bill 60

By: Senators Golden of the 8th, Stoner of the 6th, Meyer von Bremen of the 12th, Jones of the 10th, Brown of the 26th and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

To amend Part 3 of Article 3 of Chapter 2 of Title 38 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to pay, pensions, and allowances for military personnel, so as to provide for financial assistance grants to families of residents of this state who are members of the Georgia National Guard or reserve forces or reserve components of the armed forces of the United States and who have been engaged in military duty for extended periods for the defense and protection of the United States and the State of Georgia; to define certain terms; to create the Commission on Helpful Economic Relief for Our Exceptional Soldiers (HEROES) and provide for its members, powers, and duties; to create the Helpful Economic Relief for Our Exceptional Soldiers (HEROES) Trust Fund and provide for its sources of funding and administration; to provide for applications on behalf of minor family members; to provide for rules and regulations; to provide a contingent effective date; to provide for contingent refund of voluntary contributions; to provide for contingent automatic repeal; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Part 3 of Article 3 of Chapter 2 of Title 38 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to pay, pensions, and allowances for military personnel, is amended by designating the existing provisions of said part as Subpart 1 thereof and adding a new Subpart 2 to read as follows:

"Subpart 2

38-2-260.

As used in this subpart, the term:

(1) 'Commission' means the Commission on Helpful Economic Relief for Our Exceptional Soldiers (HEROES) established under Code Section 38-2-261.

(2) 'Family member' means a person who is:

(A) The husband, wife, child, or other dependent of a service member who is engaged in the performance of ordered military duty;

(B) Enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) in accordance with applicable military regulations; and

(C) A resident of this state.

(3) 'Financial assistance grant' means funds awarded to a family member based upon criteria and amounts established by the commission under this subpart.

(4) 'Ordered military duty' means any military duty performed in the service of this state or the United States, including but not limited to attendance at any service school or schools conducted by the armed forces of the United States, for a period of 90 consecutive days or longer by a service member pursuant to orders issued by competent state or federal authority.

(5) 'Service member' means a resident of this state who is a voluntary member of the National Guard or any reserve force or reserve component of the armed forces of the United States.

(6) 'Trust fund' means the Helpful Economic Relief for Our Exceptional Soldiers (HEROES) Trust Fund established under Code Section 38-2-262.

38-2-261.

(a) There is created the Commission on Helpful Economic Relief for Our Exceptional Soldiers (HEROES). The commission shall be composed of the adjutant general, the commissioner of veterans service, and three citizens who have served and been honorably discharged from the Georgia National Guard to be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the adjutant general.

(b) The members of the commission shall receive no compensation for their services on the commission but shall be reimbursed for actual expenses incurred while discharging the duties imposed upon them by this subpart.

(c) For administrative purposes the commission shall be attached to the Department of Defense of the State of Georgia. The department shall provide staff support to the commission, utilizing personnel and funds available to the department.

38-2-262.

(a) There is established the Helpful Economic Relief for Our Exceptional Soldiers (HEROES) Trust Fund to consist of any voluntary contributions to such trust fund and other moneys acquired for the use of such trust fund by any fundraising or other promotional techniques deemed appropriate by the commission or Department of Defense of the State of Georgia and all interest thereon.

(b)(1) The Department of Defense of the State of Georgia shall administer the trust fund.

(2) All balances in the trust fund shall be deposited in an interest-bearing account.

1 (3) The department shall expend moneys held in the trust fund in accordance with the
2 provisions of this subpart.

3 (4) The department shall prepare by February 1 of each year an accounting of the funds
4 received into and expended from the trust fund. The report shall be a public record and
5 made available to the commission, members of the General Assembly, and members of
6 the public on request.

7 38-2-263.

8 (a) In addition to those moneys described in subsection (a) of Code Section 38-2-262, the
9 trust fund shall also consist of any moneys appropriated thereto by the General Assembly
10 and any federal moneys deposited therein for the use of such trust fund.

11 (b) Within the trust fund, funds appropriated by the General Assembly and interest thereon
12 shall be segregated from all other moneys in the trust fund. Funds appropriated to the trust
13 fund and interest thereon shall be made available in each fiscal year for grants to family
14 members according to the criteria, priority, and amounts set by the commission and rule
15 and regulation of the Department of Defense of the State of Georgia.

16 (c) Balances in the trust fund shall not lapse but shall be carried forward each year so that
17 no part thereof shall be deposited in the general fund.

18 38-2-264.

19 (a) Each Georgia income tax return form for taxable years beginning on or after January
20 1, 2007, shall contain appropriate language, to be determined by the state revenue
21 commissioner, offering the taxpayer the opportunity to voluntarily contribute to the trust
22 fund by either donating all or any part of any tax refund due, by authorizing a reduction in
23 the refund check otherwise payable, or by contributing any amount over and above any
24 amount of tax owed by adding that amount to the taxpayer's payment. The instructions
25 accompanying the income tax return form shall contain a description of the purposes for
26 which the trust fund was established and the intended use of moneys received from the
27 contributions. Each taxpayer required to file a state income tax return who desires to
28 contribute to the trust fund may designate such contribution as provided in this Code
29 section on the appropriate income tax return form.

30 (b) The Department of Revenue shall determine annually the total amount so contributed,
31 withhold therefrom a reasonable amount for administering the voluntary contribution
32 program, and transmit the balance to the department for deposit in the trust fund; provided,
33 however, the amount retained for administrative costs shall not exceed \$50,000.00 per year.
34 If in any tax year the administrative costs of the Department of Revenue for collecting
35 contributions pursuant to this Code section exceed the sum of such contributions, the

administrative costs which the Department of Revenue is authorized to withhold from such contributions shall not exceed the sum of such contributions.

38-2-265.

(a) Subject to the provisions of this subpart and availability of funds in the trust fund, the commission shall provide financial assistance grants to family members. The commission shall be responsible for determining the amount of financial assistance grants awarded, the criteria for granting the awards, and the process to apply for the grants of financial assistance.

(b) In the development of criteria for the amount and award of grants of financial assistance by the commission, the following factors shall be included:

(1) The financial need of the family member;

(2) The disparity between the amounts of the service member's military salary and civilian salary;

(3) Whether the service member incurred service connected injury, illness, or death or is considered missing in action (MIA) or a prisoner of war (POW);

(4) The length of the period during which the service member has been engaged in ordered military duty;

(5) The availability of financial assistance from other governmental sources to the family member; and

(6) The availability of funds in the Helpful Economic Relief for Our Exceptional Soldiers (HEROES) Trust Fund.

38-2-266.

The legal guardian or custodian of a minor family member shall be entitled to apply for grants on behalf of the minor family member.

38-2-267.

(a) Code Sections 38-2-263 through 38-2-266 shall become effective on January 1, 2007, conditioned upon the ratification at the state-wide general election held in November, 2006, of an amendment to Article III, Section VI, Paragraph VI of the Constitution of Georgia authorizing the General Assembly to provide by law for financial assistance grants to families of residents of this state who are members of the Georgia National Guard or reserve forces or reserve components of the armed forces of the United States and who have been engaged in military duty for extended periods and the creation of a nonlapsing trust fund for such purpose.

(b) If such an amendment to the Constitution is not so ratified, then:

(1) Code Sections 38-2-263 through 38-2-266 shall not become effective;

(2) Moneys voluntarily contributed to the trust fund pursuant to subsection (a) of Code Section 38-2-262, with any interest accrued, shall be refunded to the voluntary contributors thereof not later than December 31, 2006; and

(3) This entire subpart shall stand repealed on January 1, 2007.

38-2-268.

The Department of Defense of the State of Georgia may promulgate such rules and regulations as are reasonable and necessary to implement the provisions of this subpart."

SECTION 2.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.